



Robert Studholme - Nurseryman and Tree-Farmer of Pembroke

In September 1882 the *Otago Witness* reported: “Tree-planting is all the rage in this locality at present. There's no mistake about it, the Cardrona forest reserve is an inestimable boon to the public of the treeless Clutha Valley and its surroundings, and everywhere within the confines of a 50-mile radius the beautifying, not to say beneficial, effects of its growing produce are already perceptible.”

The man largely responsible for this multitude of exotic trees, which have given the upper Clutha district so much of its scenic attraction enjoyed today, was Robert

Studholme, whose grave lies in the upper corner of the Wanaka cemetery. Studholme was the curator of the innovative Lake County Forest Nursery, which was started in 1878 at the suggestion of Lake County councillor Robert McDougall. For nine years he raised European and North American forest trees in the nursery, supplying the farms and households of the district with wellingtonias, pines and silver birches.

Robert Studholme was obviously green-fingered. All the 20-odd tree varieties he planted grew well from the imported seed, and his report to the council in 1880 refers to planting or transplanting forest trees by the thousands, including all varieties of pine, ash, and oak. "Eight acres had been planted, and twenty-five acres more had been fenced in with sods and quick, with poplars inside for sheltering purposes." However, despite its obvious success and environmental advantages, the nursery was a controversial topic at the council meetings, and in 1882 the *Witness* reported that "Scarcely a meeting passed but hot and sharp battles were fought, having for their object the withdrawal of supplies and shutting up of the Nursery...".

Studholme also had to constantly contend with the predations of rabbits, which destroyed 20,000 young trees during 1882. It is a testimony to his skill and good management that by the following season a further 25,000 trees were available for sale. However, the rabbits eventually proved to be too much for the viability of the nursery, and as a result it closed in 1887 after only nine years in operation. After its closure, Robert Studholme purchased a farm near Pembroke, on which he continued to successfully grow and sell large quantities of forest trees for a number of years. The *Otago Witness*, which took an ongoing interest in the tree-planting venture, was able to report in 1890 that "On a recent visit to Cromwell we were much struck with the improved appearance of the place by the growth of forest trees and ornamental shrubs, Almost every home has its plantation, and the trees have a healthy appearance."

A widower since 1888, Robert Studholme died on 8th July 1925, aged 82, and joined his wife Elizabeth and their two children in the Pembroke (Wanaka) cemetery. A pink granite stone and a bronze memorial plaque commemorates them. A plaque has also been placed on a pine tree near his home acknowledging Robert Studholme's contribution, to which the diverse range of mature trees throughout the district add their testimony.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) by Helen Gilmore.

Sources: Issues of *Otago Witness* and *Tuapeka Times* www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz; "The Cardrona Nursery", Kerry Studholme *Wanaka Story* by Irvine Roxburgh (1957)

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